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PROGRAM The Today Show

STATION WRC TV
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CITY Washington, DC

SUBJECT The CIA and New Laws to Keep Secrets

JANE PAULEY: The Supreme Court ruled yesterday that Frank Snepp, a former CIA employee, violated his contract with the government when he published a book without CIA permission, and the court ordered Snepp to turn over all his profits from the book. Coincidentally, Senate hearings on new rules for unleashing the CIA open tomorrow.

Bob Abernethy has a report.

BOB ABERNETHY: What the CIA and its friends want most, and quickly, are new laws they think will make it easier to keep secrets. With the shocks of the '70s, the disclosure of assassination plots and poison dart guns, and so on, Congress required that anytime the President approved a secret operation, covert action in some foreign country, the CIA had to notify what amounted to eight congressional committees.

MAN: I, as an intelligence officer charged with putting people into a dangerous situation, where they may get captured or killed, I'm not about to do it if two or three hundred, or four hundred people over on the Hill know.

ABERNETHY: Even the CIA's critics agree that fewer committees should be told. But they want those committees told before a covert operation, not after.

MAN: The committees, except in the most unusual and extraordinary cases, should be notified in advance, so that they have a chance to talk the President out of it, they have a chance to try to persuade the President that these actions are not appropriate and don't fit the standards that have been laid out. If you wait till it's started, then it's too late to try to turn

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